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Trinitarian Thought in the Early Modern Era

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The Trinity in the Early Modern Era (c.1550–1770)

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Abstract and Keywords

This article explores Catholic and Protestant Trinitarian theology from 1550 to 1770. It discusses various issues, from the mystical visions of Ignatius of Loyola to the Augustinian approach of Jonathan Edwards. It considers the growing variety of eclectic views and the influence of anti-Trinitarian thinkers, beginning with Michael Servetus and Faustus Socinus. It also highlights the rise of confessionalism and anti-Trinitarianism and the explosion of mystical theology during this period.

Trinitarian theology, Catholic, Protestant, Ignatius of Loyola, Jonathan Edwards, Michael Servetus, Faustus Socinus, confessionalism, anti-Trinitarianism, mystical theology

The sixteenth century saw not only the Reformation and with it a sudden diversification of Christianity and the end of Christendom, but also for the first time in a thousand years a powerful and innovative anti-Trinitarian movement that spread with considerable speed (Schmidt-Biggemann 2007: 79–130). The obvious poles of Trinitarian theology in this era were therefore confessionalism and anti-Trinitarianism. However, there is a third, usually overlooked one: the explosion of mystical theology in all confessions and, with it, numerous different approaches to the mystery of the triune God, only a few of which can be touched upon here. The first part of this article will trace the developments within Catholicism, making it clear that it was easier for Catholic theology to maintain traditional Trinitarian belief than for the various Protestant denominations, which will be analysed in part two.

Catholicism

It was especially the twentieth century reform movement around Vatican II, which found its inspirations in patristic theology, that explicitly scorned the a-historical, allegedly monolithic thought of Baroque scholasticism, labelled it a fruitless project, and thus rejected a tradition of over three hundred years of faithful, diverse, and insightful theological enterprise. Some even accused early modern scholasticism and especially its treatise De Deo Uno of paving the way for modern atheism due to its alleged demise of positive, biblical Trinitarian theology. These undifferentiated views have been challenged by the research of the last decades, mostly carried out by philosophers (Buckley 1987; Schäfer 1993; Muller 2003; Marschler 2007: 1–80). Baroque scholasticism is also often charged with being unoriginal and textbook-like. This however was the aim of this theological method, thus its name school theology (Blum 1998). Trinitarian speculation had its peculiar place within it, especially in the treatises on the Trinity, but also in the questions which were treated in liturgical, mystical, Mariological, angelical, and Biblical theology.

Since the foundation of the Society of Jesus was one of the most crucial events of Early Modern Christianity, the Trinitarian theology of St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) can serve as a starting point for our brief overview. When Ignatius in Manresa saw the Trinity in the form of three musical keys, symbolizing divine harmony, it was only the beginning of a lifelong reflection on the Trinitarian mystery. In his Spiritual Exercises one can find the image of the three persons on one throne, followed by an explication that the Incarnation is a work of all three persons. Ignatius furthermore acknowledged the grace of having seen the perichoresis of the three persons in a sun-like ball. He described the Trinity as a union of love, and creation as the gift of this love. However, his mysticism was rooted in his spiritual relationship with Christ, who is for him not only the manifestation of the triune love but also the key for the participation in the divine life. By serving Christ, one becomes one with him, and thus with the Trinity. Apostolic service and adoration of the Trinity coincide—that was the specific characteristic of Ignatian Trinitarian mysticism (Zechmeister 1985; Strucken, dissertation, 2001: 38–75).

Although Jesuit theology soon lost touch with the mystical tradition of its founder, the Jesuit authors treated the Trinity differently from other religious orders and thus tended to be more innovative. This derives from the Ratio Studiorum (1586/91), which allows two opinions about the Trinitarian dogma to be discussed freely. A good example of Jesuit ingenuity is Francisco Suarez, S.J. (1548–1617), who also had enormous influence on Early Modern

Protestantism. At the basis of his Trinitarian metaphysics was the insight that humans only have epistemological access to the Trinity through revelation. Thus, all the arguments he proposed are based on analogies or appropriations which presuppose revelation. In his treatise On Angels, he reflected upon the question of how angels can come to know the Trinity if they do not possess natural knowledge of it. It was certain for him that the angels acquire a supernatural faith in God, in the short span of time after creation but immediately before their decision for or against God. Moreover he thought it highly probable that Adam in his original grace already had knowledge of the Trinitarian Mystery. Such knowledge was for Suarez only quantitatively superior to every baptized Christian's knowledge in faith. Moreover, for Suarez God inserted Trinitarian wisdom into the Old Testament in order to prepare his chosen people for the Incarnation. However, it was only after the explicit revelation of the Trinity through Jesus Christ that belief in the dogma became necessary for obtaining salvation. In On the Incarnation, Suarez also speculated on the Trinitarian knowledge of Christ during his earthly life. In On the Mysteries of Christ's Life, he reflected upon Mary's knowledge of the Trinity: in contrast to her son, she did not have an earthly vision of it, but did have perfect faith, which included an equally perfect assertion of belief in the Trinitarian mystery—an axiom Luther vehemently denied. Erasmus' opinion that Mary did not adore Jesus as Divine immediately after birth since she was still ignorant of his Divinity was for Suarez outright heresy (Marschler 2007: 81–115). Regarding the immanent Trinity, Suarez maintains that the acts of the Divine nature, which constitute the persons, are necessary but also free—in the Trinitarian act of love there exists no difference between the two. This of course has consequences for his theological anthropology since the Trinity is used as proof that necessary actions of a personal will are compatible with the freedom of that will, such that freedom is more than choice (Marschler 2007: 712). Since all three persons act through their common nature ad extra, Suarez avoided the modalist trap, and through the strict separation of necessary intra-Trinitarian processes and creation he was able to maintain God's absolute freedom in regard to the world (Marschler 2007: 684). Regarding the distinction of the Trinitarian persons, Suarez argued for a virtual distinction between person and nature in order to avoid an absolute person in God (Marschler 2007: 719). Suarez's understanding of Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity, however, was problematic: for him the son-relationship of the man Jesus is not constituted by the union of human nature and divine person, since the 'being of the human person is none other than the being of the Logos, but by the grace following the Incarnation, which constitutes a special

relationship of the human being Jesus Christ … to God as Trinity' (Marschler 2007: 704).

Closely connected with the critique of Trinitarian thought—despite his orthodoxy—and a renewal of positive theology was Dionysius Petavius, S.J. (1583–1652). In De theologicis dogmatibus (1644–50) he aimed to show how the Trinitarian dogma is founded upon the Bible and the post-Nicene Fathers. However, he also stated that Platonism had infiltrated Christian theology, especially the pre-Nicene Fathers. He was even convinced that most of these early Fathers contradicted the Nicene Creed and were Arians or Tritheists. Thomassin (see below) together with Jean-Francois Baltus, S.J. (1667–1743) defended the pre-Nicene Fathers against the charges of Petavius, but they did not reach the erudite level of the Maurist Prudentius Maranus, O.S.B. (1703–1778) (Werner 1867: 27). Petavius' ideas were of course immediately put to use in the anti-Trinitarian movements. One of the most influential authors was the Arminian minister Jacques Souverain (d. 1698), who in Platonism Unveiled (1700) followed Petavius' critique of Platonic theology but went so far as to contrast the Jewish-Christian Divine Logos tradition with platonic thought: the Logos in John 1 was, for Souverain, relying on Socinian and Jewish exegesis, not the second person of the Trinity but the law of God. Christ was therefore only a manifestation of this Divine law but not God incarnate. Catholic authors, not happy about Petavius' outspoken ideas, from that point on carefully established in their textbooks the orthodox faith of the pre-Nicene Fathers (Berti 1770: 457–86). Positively, Petavius' idea of history as vestigium Trinitatis led to a sophisticated reflection on the development of dogma, namely his thoughts about the substantial indwelling of the Holy Spirit and thus of the Trinity to the acknowledgement that being a child of God is a gift of the Holy Spirit and not of the Divine nature. Moreover, Petavius modified the teaching of the actions of the Trinity ad extra and introduced the concept of an exclusive mission of the Spirit and his connection with the human person. In all these regards he influenced the Tübingen School, John Henry Newman, the Roman School (Passaglia and Schrader), and Matthias Scheeben (Chatellain 1884; Chadwick 1987: 58–60; Courth 1996: 34–41).

A different Jesuit innovation in Trinitarian theology was the so-called figurist theology of the missionaries to China which stated that the Chinese religion entailed important elements of Christian wisdom. Jean Baptiste Duhalde, S.J. (1674–1743) in his highly influential General History of China (1735) even went so far as to claim that in the pre-Christian Dao-de-jing the Trinity was anticipated. The papal rejection of the Jesuit attempts to reconcile Chinese

religion and Christian faith in the so-called rite-controversy also meant an end of this experiment in interreligious Trinitarian metaphysics (Rowbotham 1956; Lackner 1991). Figurative theology, however, had an ongoing impact through Leibniz, Wolff, and Scottish Catholic Wolffian Andrew Ramsay (1686–1743), and even influenced Jonathan Edwards, who also came to believe in hints of Trinitarian belief among the Chinese (McDermott 2000: 207–16).

Louis Thomassin (1619–95), an Oratorian, derived his Trinitarian theology to a great extent from the works of his community's founder, Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629). The latter's theology had stressed that through the connection of the justified Christian with Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit, one enters the life of the triune God (Cognet 1949: 58–65). Thomassin's Trinitarian theology was equally Christocentric: the baptized Christian receives the Holy Spirit and becomes a child of God. As Father and Son are united in the Spirit, so are the members of the Church united in the Spirit. This led him to the conviction that the personal indwelling of the Spirit widens the Incarnation and that the Church is the image of the hypostatic union. Consequently, in the Eucharist, the faithful also receive the life of the Father. Thus, Thomassin succeeded in connecting Trinitarian theology with Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and the doctrines of creation and grace in a fashion that follows salvation history rather than pure speculation, despite his clear preference for the platonic tradition. Moreover, he laid out one of the most consistent theologies of perichoresis in the western tradition. Thomassin's Trinitarian theology was founded upon the Bible, and on this ground he denied that any other person of the Trinity besides the Son could have been incarnated. For him, only the economic Trinity enables one to talk about the immanent Trinity (Lachenschmid 1968; Courth 1996: 41–7).

From the Dominican Order, John of St Thomas (1589–1644) deserves mention, since he contributed lastingly to the progress of Trinitarian theology by explicating Aquinas’ idea of divine love between Father and Son and the consequent procession of the Spirit:

> The love that is the Holy Spirit proceeds from a love of friendship, the reciprocal love of friendship, the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son, the same love that accompanies the generation of the Word, and is common to the two persons inasmuch as it is the operation of love with only one identical motive, the infinite Goodness that is common to them, but though common yet in that it pertains to the Father it bears on the Son and in that it pertains to the Son it bears on the Father. (Margerie 1982: 319; Cuervo 1945 Simon 1989)

From the field of mystical theology, the Spanish Carmelites have certainly contributed most greatly to the Catholic tradition: the Carmelite nun St Teresa of Avila (1515–82) regarded the contemplative union with the triune God as a ‘spiritual marriage’. She described her way of contemplative progress towards a union with the triune God in the Interior Castle, not to mention in her autobiography. In the seventh stage, the mystic receives, according to Teresa, a specific knowledge about the Trinitarian mystery by means of an intellectual vision, in which the soul realizes that ‘all these three Persons are one Substance and one Power and one Knowledge and one God alone … all three Persons communicate themselves to the soul and speak to the soul’ (Teresa of Avila 1961: 209–10). Teresa's most important Trinitarian visions occurred between 1567 and 1582: she received insight into the indwelling of all three Trinitarian persons in the soul of the mystic, the way in which the soul becomes one with the Trinity, and increasingly perceived the unity and perichoresis of the Trinity. Moreover, after her spiritual marriage she felt that her soul ‘rests’ in the mystery of the Trinitarian God (Strucken, dissertation, 2001: 76–134). For her Carmelite companion St John of the Cross (1542–91), God created the world in order to communicate his love and, more explicitly, in order to give the Son the human soul as a bride. However, the imitation of the suffering Christ in the ‘dark night of the soul’ is the only way to the Father. Christ as the bridegroom of the soul communicates knowledge, gifts, and virtues to the soul of the mystic and accompanies her, while the Spirit, who is aspirated by the bridegroom, perfects the union of the soul with God, which John called ‘divinization’. For him and for almost all Spanish Trinitarian mystics, the Father was the goal of mystical union. To him all creation is on pilgrimage with the Son and the Spirit (Strucken, dissertation, 2001: 135–202; Faraone 2002). The Trinitarian implications of the Sacred Heart mysticism of St Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–90) also proved to be of tremendous influence, since the heart was for her the symbol of the Logos’ divine Person in humanity, which recapitulated the passion of Christ, his sanctifying action through the Church, and his eschatological gift of himself in the future. Thus, it became an icon of the Trinity (Ciappi 1959; Margerie 1982: 347–8). Moreover, the visionary insights of Marie de l’Incarnation, O.S.U. (1599–1672) deepened theology's understanding of the conjugal analogy of the Trinitarian mystery (Mali 1996).

Despite its diversity, the scholastic approach to Trinitarian theology was criticized early on from within the Church, for example by the French Oratorian Pierre Faydit (1644–1709), who accused scholasticism of modalism and the early Fathers of tritheism, or by Martin Gerbert, O.S.B. (1720–93) and Placidus Stürmer, O.S.B. (1716–94) (Faydit 1696, 1702; Gerbert 1758;

Stürmer 1760). Radical reinterpretations of Trinitarian theology did not happen until the eighteenth century, when the Catholic Enlightenment evolved, e.g. in the work of Anton Oehms (1735–1809), who proposed that each person corresponds to one substance (Schlich 1906–7). Among the French Catholic theologians, the most prominent and ingenious case was Isaac Berruyere, S.J. (1681–1758), whose History of the People of God (1728–55) was a narrative theology of salvation history, which minimized the importance of the Fathers and of tradition in order to enable the papacy to define the faith according to the Bull Unigenitus—a theological vision which Berruyere inherited from his teacher Jean Hardouin, S.J. (1646–1729)—and which, together with his heterodox positions, led to the formal censoring of his work in 1734 and 1755. In 1758, Benedict XIV forbade all parts and all translations of this work; the accused theologian recanted. In Trinitarian terms Berruyere's Christology was especially questionable since he understood Jesus Christ as the Son of God who subsists in three persons and not as Son of the Father as the first person of the Trinity—thus Jesus was for him the Son of the Trinity. Since God in three Persons united the Logos, the only ‘natural Son’, to the humanity of Christ, Jesus Christ is made in time and is not Son because of the Logos’ pre-existence from all eternity. This proposition is taken from Hardouin, namely his commentary on the New Testament. This of course leads to the consequence that Jesus Christ had two fathers: as natural Son of God, he had the first person of the Trinity as Father; but as Son made in time he had God in three persons as Father. A further conundrum is that, for Berruyere, during the three days in the sepulchre Jesus Christ ceased to be a living man: thus, the human nature was separated from the Logos (Liguori 1857: 597–633; Schäzler 1870: 201–3; Palmer 1961: 65–76).

Protestantism

The anti-Trinitarians of the sixteenth century understood themselves as radical reformers of Christianity who were completing the unfulfilled task of Luther and Calvin, namely a purification of the concept of God from all non-scriptural influences. The earliest important anti-Trinitarian was Miguel Servet (1509–53), burnt for his Christianismi restitutio (1553). He denied the triple personhood of God as early as 1531, and taught an Arian Christology (Friedman 1978; Hillar and Allen 2002; Sánchez-Blanco 1977). More important, however, became the Italian Faustus Soccini (1539–1604), who developed the anti-Trinitarian ideas of his uncle Laelio into a system. His basic conviction was that the existence of three persons in one nature was contradictory. Socinus’ Christianity, which was based on good works,

since atonement through Christ was not accepted, was founded upon a strict Biblicism that lacked any regulative principle except the principle of non-contradiction. This also led him and his followers to a denial of the divine attribute of eternity in so far as it is understood with the scholastics as an enduring present moment. For Socinian Unitarianism, eternity had to be understood as successive duration—an innovation that anticipated process thought and open theism. In Poland, the Socinians formed a loose Church under the name Polish Brethren, whose Racovian Catechism (1605) was their official confessional charter. Over the next two hundred years, anti-Trinitarianism spread throughout eastern Europe, especially in Transylvania, but also to the Netherlands, England, and Germany and, with its strong belief in freedom of conscience and freedom from authority, became a driving force of the Enlightenment (Wilbur 1946; Muller 2003; Rohls 2005; Mulsow 2002; Knijff 2004).

In the seveteenth century, Arminian theology from the Netherlands, but also Socinian thought from Poland, started to transform English theology, especially in regard to its metaphysics and its rejection of speculations about the immanent Trinity. Moreover, Descartes's principle of conceptual evidence and self-certainty as starting points for any rational enterprise made Trinitarian theology appear to be an irrational enterprise, and his dualism introduced a philosophy of mind that undermined any ontological definition of the human, but also the Divine persons (Scheffczyk 1967; Leahy 2003: 19–37). The Civil War (1641–51) created an atmosphere in which extreme religious and philosophical ideas flourished, as evidenced by the publication of Thomas Hobbes's (1588–1679) Leviathan in 1651. For Hobbes, himself heavily influenced by Descartes, the Trinity was an unclear, indeed artificial concept, not central to Christianity. Moreover, he reintroduced the Ciceronian understanding of the person-as-actor and understood it no longer as subsistence, which rendered traditional Trinitarian theology problematic. The Cambridge Platonists, especially Ralph Cudworth (1617–88), defended the Christian Trinity by relying on the traditional theologia prisca, which detected traces of the Trinity in ancient wisdom and the Old Testament. Their emphasis on moral activism, which somewhat marginalized the Trinity, and their understanding of creation as emanation from the ultimate, triune monad (Taliaferro 2003; Muller 2003: 100–1) were problematic, however. Among the English Puritan theologians, John Owen (1616–83) deserves special attention, since he applied his ingenious combination of eastern and western Trinitarian theology rigorously to Christian piety, and thus conceived a highly sophisticated, thoroughly biblical theology of communion with the triune God (Trueman 1998).

In the midst of another political crisis, immediately before and after the Glorious Revolution (1688) and thus in close connection with anti-Catholic sentiments, Stephen Nye (1648–1719) published A Brief History of the Unitarians (1687), in which he asserted that the Trinity was an unnecessary, and moreover irrational, dogma. Nye and others were furthermore convinced that belief in the Trinity had contributed to the decline of Christianity, since it had corrupted the Gospels and embraced polytheism. Briefly before, in 1685, Bishop George Bull (1634–1710) had unsuccessfully attempted to defend the dogma in his Defence of the Nicene Faith, in which he argued that the Church had always believed and taught the explicit Trinitarian doctrine of Nicaea. As a response to Nye, in 1690 the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London, William Sherlock (1641–1707), published his famous Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity. However, instead of helping the Trinitarian cause, his book started one of the biggest crises of modern theology, especially because Sherlock aspired to explain the Trinity in easily understandable but new terms. Thus, he stated that the three persons are three infinite minds, each of which has a self-consciousness of its own, which is distinct from the others. The unity of the three persons lies in the fact that these three minds are aware of each other, in a mutual-consciousness, which ‘ensures that ad extra is one will, energy and power’ (Dixon 2003: 114). Critics, however, remarked that consciousness cannot be the formal reason for a Divine person since the latter is ontologically prior; moreover, if one followed Sherlock's stream of thought, there could be innumerable persons and minds in God; additionally, his real distinction of the divine persons (instead of a modal or virtual distinction) leads to tritheism. Among the debaters, Matthew Tindal (1655–1733) observed two camps: Nominal Trinitarians, like Robert South (1634–1716), who were orthodox but irrational, and Real Trinitarians like Sherlock, who were rational but tritheists. John Locke (1632–1704) held a concept similar to Sherlock's. Edward Stillingfleet (1635–99), who defended the classical concept of person as a manner of subsistence with incommunicable properties in a common nature, consequently saw in Locke's philosophy of the person, but also in his undermining of the concept of sub-stance, the grounds for the rising denial of the Trinitarian dogma. Moreover, he publicly charged Locke with Socinianism (Montuori 1983; Marshall 1994). Eighteenth-century rationalist, mostly Arian theology also contributed to the marginalization of the Trinity, for example Samuel Clarke's (1675–1729) The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity (1712). Clarke not only denies the existence of one indivisible divine essence, but also the idea of coeternal, distinctive persons, since the traditional terms were irreconcilable with the Newtonian understanding of extension (Muller 2003: 131). In order to defend the dogma against the

charge of irrationalism or historical corruption, Trinitarians increasingly turned to a univocal language about the Trinitarian mystery and avoided the rich analogical tradition which had kept the dogma alive in public devotion. The Trinity became more and more a theological problem and almost vanished from Christian devotional life, also because the cause lacked any popular apologist. The structural problem of Anglicanism as the embodied compromise between Puritanism and Catholicism made it inevitable to follow the steadily narrowing concept of reason as the key to interpreting the scriptural sources for Trinitarian theology. The road was set for subordinationist and Unitarian tendencies (Mulsow 2002: 275–6), and, in this setting, it comes as no surprise that as early as 1718 the English Presbyterians had already split into a Trinitarian and a Unitarian/semi-Arian Church (Dixon 2003; Muller 2003: 94–135).

In the structure of the treatises on the Trinity, Lutheran theology followed to a great extent the Catholic tradition with minor changes. With Johann Gerhard's (1582–1632) Exegesis of the Articles of Faith (1626), however, the treatment of Trinitarian theology began to take a new shape. Gerhard still followed traditional belief, e.g. that the persons' modes of subsistence are identical with their intra-Trinitarian relations, but he split the theological exposition of the dogma now into prolegomena, onomatology, and pragmatology. Whereas the prolegomena contained the main axioms, e.g. the necessity of the doctrine for salvation, onomatology laid out a clarification of the terminology. Here, Gerhard insisted that theologians should only use terms that were already received by the Church. Pragmatology then proved the Trinity from Scripture. Despite the heavy emphasis on the scriptural proof of the Trinity, orthodox dogmatic theology never gave up central scholastic axioms, that is, the virtual differentiation between divine nature and persons or the personal order within the Trinity (ordo personalis) (Schäfer 1983: 122–41; Ratschow 1966: 84). Dissenters from this classical outline, like Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), who explained the Trinity voluntaristically in his main Trinitarian work The Three Principles of the Divine Essence (1619) and who consequently influenced Rosicrucians and Spiritualists, as well as Pierre Poiret (1646–1719), who applied an ingenious combination of rational psychology and theology to the Trinitarian mystery, were exceptions (Krieg 1979; O'Regan 2002).

Within the Reformed Tradition, Jacob Arminius' (1560–1609) contribution to Trinitarian thought is usually overlooked in favour of his demolition of the belief in predestination. However, his explanation of the Trinity argued that God the Father had aseitas, life in himself. When the Son is begotten, the

Father communicates to the Son this essence, and therefore it is the former's exclusive attribute. The Son therefore cannot be autotheos. Arminius thus started a controversy that asked the fundamental theological question of what was generated in the generation of the Son, and made clear that the Remonstrants differed from Reformed Orthodoxy, which with Calvin and Lucas Trelcatius (1542–1602) claimed that the generation of the Son was one of 'sonship, and that the divine essence, belonging to the three persons in common, was itself ingenerate, and that the Son, … as God has the attribute of aseity as well' (Muller 2003: 87–8). Moreover, Remonstrants also gave up the Trinity as a fundamental article of faith, which not only led Lutheran Orthodox like Johann Friedrich König (1619–64) to assert that belief in the Trinity was necessary for salvation, without which no one could achieve salvation, but also increased popular catechesis in order to secure the Trinitarian belief among the faithful (Hauschild 1999: 439). However, Lutheran Orthodoxy also faced a number of theological problems: as a result of the Lutheran axiom of the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ, some theologians appropriated to the human nature divine omniscience and power. Georg Calixt (1586–1656), however, argued that the infinite nature of the Divine Being could not be communicated to a finite human nature, and that this Lutheran doctrine led to Eutychianism (Baur 1843: 441–52). In his On the Trinity (1649) Calixt also questioned one of the most cherished axioms of Lutheran orthodoxy, namely the scriptural proof of the Trinity from the Old Testament, which was due to the anti-Trinitarian controversies at the centre of the doctrine and thus one of the best- developed parts of Lutheran thought. For this move, he was criticized not only by fellow Lutherans but also by the reformed theologian Francis Turretin (1623–87), since the Socinians immediately put Calixt's arguments to use (Muller 2003: 92–3).

While the vast majority of the Protestant tradition confirmed the doctrine a posteriori, a few tried a priori explanations. The reformed Bartholomew Keckermann (1572–1609), Henry Ainsworth (1571–1622), and Franz Burmann (1628–79) offered proofs of the Trinity by setting up a logic of the divine emanations. For Keckermann the object of God's intellect can only be God, since both have to be perfect. Thus, the divine intellect eternally reflects upon itself and has as object the perfect image of itself. Such an image, he continued, can properly be called a generation, since generation is 'nothing other than the act of a substance, by which it produced from itself a like substance; when therefore God by conceiving of himself produces a substantial image of himself, this is rightly called the generation of that self-image' (at Muller 2003: 163). Erhard Weigel (1625–99) attempted to explain the Trinity with mathematical theories but was forced to recant his ideas in

1679. It is, however, a common misconception that Leibniz (1646–1716) also gave a rationalist explanation of the Trinity. Rather, he defended the dogma against Socinians and Spinozists by showing the non-contradictoriness of Trinitarian faith. His apologetic strategy relied on the presumption of faith. This presumption of faith, however, was valid until a proof to the contrary had been given. Thus, the dogmas of the Church handed down through the centuries could be considered true ‘until it has been proved incontrovertibly that they are self-contradictory’ (Antognazza 2008: 20). Unfortunately, Leibniz’ theology remained an exception. The fact that theologies about the Trinity in the Protestant world became increasingly Biblicist, without offering an effective, rational exposition of the immanent Trinity, contributed heavily to a fading of Trinitarian imagination, to anti-intellectual and ultimately modalist expositions of the Trinity in the Pietism of Samuel Urlsperger (1685–1772) or the mysticism of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) (Dorner 1878: 383–4; Rohls 1997: 110), but especially to the surrender to the narrow, rationalist concept of reason.

A good example of this narrowing concept of reason is the ‘new scholasticism’ of Christian Wolff (1679–1754), whose eclectic use proved to be helpful for the orthodox theologies of Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten (1706–57) and Kant's teacher Martin Knutzen (1713–51) (Sorkin 2008: 113–65; Gómez-Tutor 2004). However, if one applied Wolff's mathematical method radically to theology, it led to rationalist outcomes, for instance in the theology of Johann Peter Reusch (1691–1758), who identified three principles in God, and thus a clear modalism (Baur 1843: 590–4), or Joachim Darjes (1714–91), who claimed that the Trinity was no mystery of faith but comprehensible with the means of natural theology and psychology (Bernet 2001). Similar things can be said about the Dutch Arminian Paul Maty, who in 1729 asserted that the second and the third persons of the Trinity were finite, created minds, only afterwards united with the always-existing infinite mind of the Father (Meier 1844: 81–2).The attempt of the medical doctor Gottlieb Berger to explain the Trinity (1778) with new analogies from natural science, e.g. the mixtures of certain chemical components, also did not support traditional Trinitarian faith but ended in modalism (Bretschneider 1819: 430–1).

A further diminution of Trinitarian belief during the Enlightenment was due to the increasing historical critique of the Bible. While Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91) did not contribute content-wise to a better understanding of the Trinity, he emphasized the individual freedom of conscience in accepting the Trinitarian dogma and introduced the idea of the historical relativity

of dogmatic decisions, including the realm of Trinitarian debate. For him, the Church Fathers were in no better position to judge the mysteries of the Faith than eighteenth-century thinkers (Powell 2001: 69–79). Lessing's (1729–81) remarks about the Trinity would not be worth mentioning if they had not influenced German Idealism and Romanticism so lastingly. For Lessing, creation as the act of the triune God was of the same metaphysical necessity as the generation of the Logos. The Trinity itself was for him just an extrapolation of human consciousness into the absolute. He also asserted the impossibility of identifying the historical Jesus with the second person of the Trinity. By bringing history to the table of Trinitarian discussions, Semler and Lessing paved the way for Hegel (Nisbet: 1999).

Pietism evolved in Reformed and Lutheran areas, heavily influenced by Jacob Philip Spener (1633–1705). The majority of pietist groups accepted the traditional orthodox doctrine of the Trinity but stressed the spiritual experience of the Trinitarian mystery while neglecting the theological explanation of it. Also, the Evangelical Revival of John Wesley (1703–91) borrowed from the pietist tradition (Vickers 2008: 69–190). As an example of the anti-intellectual pietist tradition, the Trinitarian theology of Count Zinzendorf (1700–60) might suffice. By accepting the revelation of the Trinity through Jesus Christ, the faithful acquire a new nature that transforms every aspect of their lives due to the newly acquired access to the Trinitarian Mystery. This approach also led him to restrict his theology to the economic Trinity and to reject philosophical investigations of the Trinity. Consequently, he gave up central axioms of scholastic thought, so that he appropriated creation, redemption, and sanctification to the Divine Logos alone. For him the Trinity acts towards humans only in and through Christ. Also problematic was his constant use of the Holy Family as analogy for the Trinity which easily conveyed a tritheistic connotation (Zimmerling 2002). Thoroughly orthodox however was the Trinitarian theology of the American Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), which consistently applied the Augustinian mutual love analogy to the Trinity. Moreover the relational ontology he developed served as foundation for his ecclesiology (Sairsingh 1986; Studebaker 2003; Studebaker 2009).

Suggested Reading

Antognazza (2008); Courth (1996); Dixon (2003); Margerie (1982); Marschler (2007).

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